

# MINUTES

**Fourth Quarterly Meeting of the  
MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION  
Held, pursuant to notice  
Wednesday, January 22, 2003 — 10:00 AM  
VFW Post 1003, 217 East Capitol Avenue  
Jefferson City, MO**

## **I. CALL TO ORDER**

- A. Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance
- B. Roll Call  
In attendance: **Chairman, Carl Niewoehner, Member Bernadette Miller, Member Emmett Fairfax, and Member Carson Ross.**  
Excused absence: **Vice Chairman Donald Gralike**
- C. Introductions  
Guests and staff present.
  - 1. Guests: **Jim Whitfield**, Western Area Coordinator, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Col. Wayne Medley**, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Gary Williams**, Director Regional Office Dept. of Veterans Affairs; **Larry Daniels**, DAV, Dept of MO; **Tom Granger**, AFSCME MO Council #72; **James Hughes**, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Dept of MO; **Paul Connors**, Veterans of Foreign Wars; **Jack Matthews**, Pres. MO Veterans Commission Foundation; **Carl Hargus**; **Aaron Washburn**, Representing Senator Talent; **John Eckhoff**, St. Louis County Human Service Director; **Kathy Sturgeon**, St. Louis County Human Service Office; **Lawrence Helm**, St. Louis County Human Services; **Erica Way**, St. Louis County Human Services; **Michael Bounds**, St. Louis City Human Service Manager; **Gary Campbell**, Director VA Medical Center Columbia; **Nancy Arnold**, Director Poplar Bluff VA Medical Center; **Linda Kurtz**, Director St. Louis VA Medical Center; **Clark Pointer**, American Legion State Commander, V. Chair MAVO; **Jerry Hotop**, AMVETS Dept. of MO; **Brad Pendleton**, VA Regional Service Center Manager;
  - 2. Staff: **Ronald Taylor**, Executive Director; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary; **Ralph Durnbaugh**, Director of Planning; **Sharon Keith**, Director, Service to Veterans Program; **Hal Dulle**, Assistant Director; **Jess Rasmussen**, Lead Director Higginsville Cemetery; **Mike Robbins**, Director Springfield Cemetery; **Jerry Quigley**, Director Jacksonville Cemetery; **Ken Swearingen**, Director Bloomfield Cemetery; **Larry Wilson**, Veteran Service Officer; **Sheri Stone**, Veteran Service Secretary;

**Bonnie McNeal-Boyt**, Trainer; **Christina Acree**, Director Information Systems; **Don Long**, Administrator Mt. Vernon Veterans Home; **Stan Smith**, Administrator Warrensburg Veterans Home; **Jan Rau**, Administrator Cape Girardeau Veterans Home;

- D. Approval of November 22, 2002 Commission Meeting Minutes. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as recorded. Commissioner Fairfax made a motion to accept the minutes and Commissioner Miller seconded the motion.
- E. Ron Taylor and Sharon Keith presented Sheri Stone with Employee of the Fourth Quarter Service to Veterans Program plaque.
- F. Chairman Niewoehner read aloud "Veterans Appreciation Day" Proclamation presented by the Governor's office on this day January 22, 2003.

## **II. NEW BUSINESS:**

Military Honors Program – Colonel Medley reported that the Funeral Honors Program have coordinated 22,850 funeral services to date and average 21 services per day and 645 per month throughout the state. January completed 654. Overall a 99% success ratio of servicing our veterans. Two new locations Poplar Bluff and Joplin have team leaders hired an office locations set up and telephone numbers and ready to start taking services by the first of February. Positive results from the bugler test project for Missouri. Can demonstrate bugle today if anyone interested.

Larry Daniels, Disabled American Veterans reported DAV now has 27 vans in Missouri to transport patients. 8 new vans have been ordered for Missouri and are scheduled to come in June.

Seating of Carson Ross, newly appointed Commissioner. Fourteen year veteran to the Missouri House of Representatives and also serves on the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans.

Gary Williams, Director St. Louis Regional Office Dept. Veterans Affairs reported that backlog in the St. Louis Regional Office is reducing in numbers. Mr. Williams introduced Brad Pendleton, Service Center Manager from St. Louis.

Gary Campbell, Director VA Medical Center Columbia reported actively involved in the strategic planning for CARES (Capital Assets Realignment for Enhanced Services) program. Advisory Council groups working on statewide Bio terrorism and smallpox vaccine. Also introduced Nancy Arnold, Poplar Bluff and Linda Kurtz, St. Louis to the Commissioners. Ms. Kurtz spoke briefly on VA budget issues. No new updates on 2003 budget amounts.

Tom Granger, AFSCME MO Council #72 reported to the Commissioners employees concerns about mandatory overtime and security pertaining to new facility at Mt. Vernon. Don Long, Administrator Mt. Vernon responded that a security system is not currently in budget for Mt. Vernon but will be reviewed. Mr. Granger read aloud a letter wrote by the employees of the State Veterans Home in Warrensburg. Mr. Niewoehner informed Mr. Granger of the budget situations and asked him to properly forward the letter to the Executive Director.

Linda Kurtz, Director St. Louis VA Medical Center thanked the Commission for the CBOC space at the Homes and described the Advanced Access Scheduling at the St. Louis CBOC location. This is a part of a new effort to eliminate waits and delays in the clinic. VA will be introducing this system to the other locations. VA is currently up to 375,000 outpatient visits per year from 250,000 in 1998. Expect 400,000 veterans this year.

Jack Matthews, President Missouri Veterans Commission Foundation, Inc. reported to the Commission the Veterans Golf Tournament is scheduled for September 12, 2003 at Tanglewood Golf Course. Apologized on behalf of MAVO and the Foundation that the Commission was not introduced at the reception on Tuesday evening.

James Hughes, Commander VFW and Chairman MAVO, thanked everyone for coming and offered MAVO and VFW assistance to veterans.

Clark Pointer, American Legion State Commander and Vice Chair MAVO, Thanked everyone for their good work and offered American Legion assistance.

Jerry Hotop, State Commander AMVETS thanked everyone.

Nancy Arnold, Director Poplar Bluff VA Medical Center, thanked the Commission for the new clinic at Cape Girardeau. Also thanked DAV for the 2 new vans for remote clinic areas.

Aaron Washburn, Representing Senator Talent's office from Jefferson City, reported to the Commission the Senator is dedicated to continuing supporting the veterans as promised.

### **III. OLD BUSINESS:**

#### Management Report: Executive Director Comments: Ronald Taylor

Introduced State Cemetery Directors to Commission, Carl Hargus retired employee from the Commission, Administrators from three Veterans Homes, Christina Acree and Bonnie McNeal-Boyt Central Office, Sharon Keith and Ralph Durnbaugh. John Eckhoff and other staff from St. Louis County Human Services and Gary Collins from the St. Louis Vet Center.

**Budget:** FY2004 state income no improvements. The commission plans to continue progress with the new facilities and two new cemeteries. The release of Tobacco Bonds was addressed by Mr. Taylor and reported could have a sale of \$350 million for the rest of this fiscal year. No layoffs have occurred within the Commission. Next year an estimated 1 billion dollar shortfall for the state is anticipated. Possible layoffs of Homes and STV program employees if this should occur. Governor's recommendation for VBATF to continue toll free number and outreach program for veterans.

Commissioner Niewoehner advised a legislative member recently that the only cut MVC can make is cutting staff from Homes and that would mean taking care of less veterans. Mr. Taylor pointed out that a small percent of GR funds our veterans homes. The majority comes from federal per diem and resident rates. Only 17% from GR funded the homes last year. Federal Per diem rate increased recently but we are getting that at this time due to budget resolution. Mr. Taylor participated in a teleconference in reference to stopping enrolling of veterans in category 8. Figures show nationwide this would eliminate 160,000 – 180,000 veterans who might have enrolled this fiscal year (determined by HUD and VA guidelines). If veterans were already enrolled previously they will not be affected. Encourage veterans to talk to your Federal Representatives about this budget issue and what would be necessary to help the VA in this situation.

State Chief Commander Wahwassuck, Disabled American Veterans, reported to the Commission the protection of Veterans DD214 at County Courthouses. This information should not be public and that legislation has been introduced to change this.

#### Missouri Veterans Homes: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

**Homes Program** – Cameron and Warrensburg Homes are on their way to being fully staffed soon. Mt. Vernon Home is making much progress on new location. Commissioner Niewoehner reported on each Home the number of residents and waiting list.

Commissioner Niewoehner reported on the Community Based Outpatient Clinic statistics.

#### Construction Update: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

**Construction** – Report Update January 22, 2003, prepared by Tim Norton was handed out. (attachment) Minor projects at Springfield and Higginsville Cemetery to be completed in March.

### Cemeteries:

**Cemetery Program** - Commissioner Niewoehner reported 475 pre-determinations to date at the Bloomfield Cemetery; 114 pre-determinations to date at Jacksonville Cemetery; 1,006 burials completed and 2,997 pre-eligibility certifications completed at Springfield Cemetery and 283 burials and 1,357 pre-certifications completed at the Higginsville Cemetery. Jess Rasmussen, Director Higginsville Cemetery noted that Customer Service at MO State Veterans Cemeteries is great. Other states have contacted MO to come and visit and look at what is being done.

**Cemetery Feasibility Study** – Based on VA criteria a needs assessment to determine locations of additional cemeteries. Jefferson Barrack will be filled in 2012-2015. Initial findings are that presently no state cemetery is warranted in St. Louis and Kansas City but that the federal grants program might approve a project in the Ft. Leonard Wood area. The Commission is currently evaluating potential operating costs and also seeking additional information from the federal VA. Once the needs assessment information has been completed a copy will be mailed to the Commissioners.

### Service to Veterans Program: Sharon Keith, Director, Service to Veterans Program

**Service to Veterans** – Ms. Keith reported the STV Program employees 50 personnel and 40 Veterans Service Officers throughout the state to assist veterans with their VA claim work. Due to the CBOC openings the number of veterans seeking assistance has increased. The office locations and business hours are located on the MVC Website.

### VSO Grants: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

**STV Grant Program**- Mr. Taylor reported this is the second year for this program and has been a success. The grants help service organizations in their outreach programs and also to assist with Veteran Benefits Supermarkets.

### Memorial Grants: Ron Taylor, Associate Director

**Memorial Grants Program** – Mr. Taylor reported that some new grant request have been received but still have two existing projects one not completed at this time and the other still getting information together to submit. These request should be completed within the next 3 to 4 weeks with will allow us to determine balance. No funding in the recommended budget for next fiscal year on memorial grants. These grants are funded from the Veterans Trust Fund which is projected by 2006 will be depleted. This money is now vital in assisting the cemeteries and homes.

State Auditors reported completed in December and they have informed us the VCCITF is going broke. Recommended we should continue to concentrate on our core programs: homes, cemeteries and STV Program.

**VBATF** – Ralph Durnbaugh updated the Commission on the Veterans Benefits Awareness Task Force. The first planning meeting for the Joplin Supermarket will be on January 30 in Joplin. Meeting should target mid to late March Supermarket. Nine Supermarkets have been planned this year. A total of five Supermarkets were conducted over the past year, three in St. Louis and two in Kansas City.

The task force is continuing to work on several different methods of outreach programs. The past week 4,677 VBATF mail stuffers were mailed out to veterans. These names and addresses were provided to the commission as a result of a survey conducted by the Senior Rx Program.

Claim Services Office assists veterans with claims and were provided 1,000 VBATF mail stuffers to hand out to their clients. A Veterans Benefits Awareness ad will be published in their monthly publication.

Masonic Home of Missouri contacted us and will be running a Veterans Benefits Awareness ad in their publication which has 51,000 subscribers.

Currently working with Rural Missouri and Today's Farmer Magazine in running an ad in the May, June and October publications. The Rural Missouri reaches over 450,000 households throughout the state.

Task Force also will be looking into "Veterans in Classrooms" project in working with Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in facilitating throughout the state.

Chart of Toll Free 800# (provided) indicates totals calls since August has been 2,285.

One additional note to point out that VA figures indicate there has been a \$46 million increase in benefits paid out to Missouri veterans.

Mr. Durnbaugh thanked John Eckhoff and Kathy Sturgeon for their leadership and hard work they have provided on the Supermarket program.

#### **IV. OTHER BUSINESS:**

Chairman Niewoehner thanked the VA for their support due to all prescription drugs for the Homes are purchased through the VA. It is estimated that it saves the state of Missouri between 1.5 and 2 million dollars per year in purchasing drugs through the VA. Informed there will be a cost increase for the drugs between 18% and 20% this year.

A total number of 1,321 veterans resided in our Veterans Homes sometime during FY02, and the average active duty of these residents is 5 ½ years. Over the past year there was total of 104,681 volunteer hours at our homes and over \$680,000 in donations.

Hal Dulle, Assistant Director reminded everyone to visit the Website to see pictures of the reception and also thanked Bob Deeken for his assistance at the VFW Post 1003.

James Hughes noted that the Lt. Governor has scheduled a Press Conference at 1:00 concerning veterans issues.

MAVO meeting at 1:30 today.

Representative Chris Shoemaker, Chairman House Veterans Affairs Committee spoke to Commission and attendees and informed all of his open door policy and looks forward to serving the veterans.

#### **NEXT MEETING**

Chairman Niewoehner announced the next Commission meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> at 10:00- 12:00 at MVC Headquarters.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned.



---

Ronald L. Taylor, Secretary